

MUSHROOM FLOWERS

SAFETY: Some mushrooms can be poisonous. Always wash your hands thoroughly after picking wild mushrooms. Never, ever eat plants or fungi you cannot identify. Always ask for assistance from an adult when working with sharp tools or instruments.

Follow these instructions to take a closer look at a mushroom and make pretty images using its spores.

YOU WILL NEED

- Mushrooms (from the greengrocer or supermarket, or wild ones from your garden)
- A4 black and/or white cardboard
- Knife or a blade – get an adult to help you

There are over 50 known species of mushroom that can glow in the dark.



WHAT TO DO

1. Look at the underside of your mushrooms. If they're a dark colour, such as brown or black, use white card. If they're a light colour, such as orange or yellow, use black card.
2. Place your sheet of card somewhere away from any breezes.
3. Carefully pluck the stem from your mushroom, or use the knife to trim it.
4. If the edge of the mushroom curls underneath, trim it back just enough to expose the mushroom's underside.
5. Place the mushroom onto the card, bottom-side down.
6. Wait a day.
7. Carefully lift the mushroom from the card and look at the flower shape it left behind.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

On the underside of your mushroom's cap there are thin lines radiating out from the stem to the edge. These are called gills, and are what distinguish mushrooms from other fungi.

Instead of roots, mushrooms have long, branching networks of filaments called mycelia that run underground or grow in dead and rotting plant material. Mycelia can sprout new mushrooms after heavy rains. Each year, large networks of mycelia growing in the soil can spread out a little further, creating circles of mushroom patches which are sometimes described as fairy rings.

Mushrooms can release microscopic spores into the air which float away and settle to form new mycelia elsewhere. The flower patterns on your card are these spores showing the mushroom's gill pattern.

APPLICATIONS

What's the difference between a toadstool and a mushroom? While you might think one is poisonous and the other safe to eat, the terms are more historical than scientific. It takes a lot of skill to recognise which species of mushroom are edible, as there is no single trait that marks all poisonous ones. A mushroom might look similar to one you'd buy in a supermarket but could make you quite sick if you popped it into your mouth.

Fungi play a vital role in many ecosystems as decomposers. Described as saprophytes, fungi such as mushrooms release digestive enzymes into their environment through their hyphae, breaking down dead matter and absorbing the nutrients.



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